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ABSTRACT

Significant attention has been given to the effectiveness of the federal bilingual education program, Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1975, although evaluations have often focused on philosophical issues rather than educational outcomes. Measures of program effectiveness have often been inappropriate for the goals, complexities, and limitations of the legislation. Some evaluations have been too narrow in focus, and others have been too broad for the program's resources and design. Studies of bilingual education program effectiveness must reflect the historical situation the program was designed to address, the limitations in structure of Title VII, and the variety of goals and measures of effectiveness for both students and institutions. These include: achievement in English and other academic skills; increased student persistence, attendance, and academic aspiration; enhanced parent involvement; improved program availability, efficiency, and support; and better testing. (MSE)

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Bilingual education is a complex issue. The federal bilingual education program, Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, was designed to increase the educational opportunities available to limited English proficient children by increasing school districts' ability to teach children English and ensure that they don't fall behind in other subject matter while they learn English. Bilingual programs use both English and the child's native language to achieve those goals. Title VII provides services both to students and educational institutions. As is the case with many educational programs, significant attention has been focused on the program's effectiveness. Unfortunately, many times purported examinations of the effectiveness of Title VII have really centered on philosophical issues and not on a systematic examination of the outcomes of the federal program. Additionally, because many people are not familiar with the goals, complexities or limitations of Title VII, they select inappropriate measures of program effectiveness. Sometimes the focus is overly narrow and does not consider all of the program goals and ways in which success may be measured. Other times the small programs assisted by Title VII are expected to do far more than their limited resources and designs allow. If the effectiveness of the federal program is truly to be examined, studies must reflect the historical situation which the program was designed to address, the limitations in the structure of Title VII, and the fact that there are a variety of program goals and measures of effectiveness, both student and institution-based. This paper discusses some of the issues which complicate evaluations of Title VII and argues that evaluation criteria must be broad-based, and reflective of program goals and resources.

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THE QUESTION OF EFFECTIVENESS: A BLUEPRINT FOR EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF THE FEDERAL BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

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THE QUESTION OF EFFECTIVENESS: A BLUEPRINT FOR EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF THE FEDERAL BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

I. INTRODUCTION

Much of the recent debate on bilingual education has centered on the issue of program effectiveness. Although reductions in federal education funding have caused close scrutiny of the effectiveness of a variety of programs, nowhere has the question of effectiveness been debated with more fervor and less facts than in discussions of the federal bilingual education program, Title VII. The wide variability among programs funded by Title VII and the scarcity of research and longitudinal evaluations make this a complicated issue even when the discussion is limited strictly to relevant concerns. The recurring debate about bilingual education, however, cannot be solely attributed to the question of program effectiveness. In fact, program effectiveness often has nothing to do with the impassioned debates which surround bilingual education. Other issues, such as the appropriateness of using a non-English language as a means of instruction, the right of the federal government to prescribe or establish a preference for bilingual education, and the appropriate goals of any program designed for limited English proficient (LEP) children are more often the real issues behind the debate. While these issues are interrelated and do have implications for federal bilingual education, they have often clouded and confused discussions of the effectiveness of Title VII and have caused discussions of program effectiveness to become philosophical debates about issues removed from the question at hand. Although debating these other issues is indeed a valid endeavor, they are not germane to the question of whether federally assisted bilingual programs do the job they were designed to do. Discussing that issue, and exploring appropriate ways in which the effectiveness of Title VII may be measured, is a sufficiently important and ambitious task.

Unfortunately, most of the recent discussions about the effectiveness of bilingual education, and especially of Title VII bilingual programs, have addressed philosophical issues rather than examining the outcomes of bilingual programs. This confusion of issues together with a lack of familiarity with the complexities of bilingual programs, have caused both primary and secondary researchers and evaluators to be unnecessarily narrow in the selection of variables to be considered in program evaluations. Program goals have been oversimplified or selectively studied and some evaluators have assumed a homogeneity in program design, implementation and student population which simply does not exist. Reliance on only one criterion as a measure of program effectiveness instead of using broad-based criteria which reflect all program goals often has resulted in important examples of success going unnoticed. These overly narrow evaluations do not reflect the broad variety of program goals, the historical situation Title VII programs were designed to address or the multi-faceted educational needs of the target population. Additionally, it is important to consider that Title VII has not only student-based goals, but was also designed affect educational institutions. Any truly useful evaluations of the effectiveness of Title VII must include both student and institutional criteria and be based on a variety of measures which reflect program goals, and student and program diversity.

II. DIVERSITY AMONG PROGRAMS AND STUDENTS

Any factual discussion of the effectiveness of federal bilingual education programs must take into consideration the wide variety of programs covered by the term "bilingual education". The only consistent similarity

among Title VII's locally designed programs is that which is stipulated in the legislation. Title VII legislation provides only minimal guidance, defining bilingual education as a program in which:

> there is instruction given in, and study of, English and, to the extent necessary to allow a child to achieve competence in the English langauge, the native language of the children of limited English proficiency, and such instruction is given with appreciation for the cultural heritage of such children, and of other children in American society, and, with respect to elementary and secondary school instruction, such instruction, shall, to the extent necessary, be in all courses of subjects of study which will allow a child to progress effectively through the educational system....

Issues such as the exact mix of languages (time to be spent in each language and subjects taught in each language), instructional methodology, entry, placement and exit standards, teacher competencies, nature and degree of parent involvement, etc., have been left to states and districts to determine according to local needs and abilitites. Test selection and data collection matters are also left to the discretion of states and local districts. This tremendous variability makes comparison of programs difficult. Researchers and evaluators are often in the position of being asked to compare programs so dissimilar that few valid comparisons can be drawn.

Diversity exists not only in program design, but also with respect to the limited English proficient (LEP) population, which is extremely heterogeneous. Limited English proficient students vary from refugees from preliterate Southeast Asian cultures to American Indian and Hispanic American citizens. They are refugees, immigrants and U.S. citizens and reside in every state in the U.S. Although Hispanic students are the most numerous group, LEP students from over 91 language backgrounds participate in federal bilingual programs. LEP students have differing degrees of proficiency in English, and differing backgrounds in their own languages. Literacy and educational background of both students and parents vary tremendously.

Socioeconomic, cultural and geographic variables are of great importance and, as in any population of children, there is tremendous individual variability. Although LEP children from poor, non-metro backgrounds and LEP children from upper middle-class urban backgrounds may both be learning English, their educational needs and educational attainment are not likely to be identical. It is often impossible to reliably compare projects serving widely different sectors of the LEP population. However, although all these variables are important to consider, rich or poor, citizen or non-citizen, all of these children are denied equal educational opportunity because they cannot understand the language of instruction in our public schools.

III. TOWARD MORE BROAD-BASED CRITERIA

Despite the fact that the heterogeneity of bilingual programs makes comparisons between programs difficult and sweeping pronouncements about "bilingual education" suspect, it is still possible to talk about the effectiveness of the federal bilingual education program. However, the unidimensional and simplistic approaches which have characterized recent federal debates about program effectiveness are inappropriate. The distinct educational problems of limited English proficient children, and the historical problems Title VII was designed to address, do not allow for such approaches. Title VII was designed to help school districts provide equal educational opportunities to their LEP students, and program effectiveness should be determined by using both student and institutional criteria.

Unfortunately, few examinations of bilingual education have utilized broad-based criteria reflecting the variety of program goals which exist. Student and institution-based measures of effectiveness are rarely considered

together and policy recommendations have been made based on only one or two measures. Much of the current debate is based on discussions of program effectiveness measured using only the following two student-based criteria:

- Better performance in English; and
- Better performance in nonlanguage subject areas.

Basing a discussion of the effectiveness of Title VII on only those two student-based measures only allows for an examination of one narrow facet of the program. Even considering what those two criteria are intended to measure, they are overly simplistic and often too narrowly delimited. Aside from the obvious question of "better than what?", there are a number of different skill areas in English language acquisition which can and should be measured.

All too often "performance in English" is operationally defined as simply the ability to speak and understand English, as measured by a standardized test. Reading, writing, vocabulary, spelling and complex comprehension skills are often left unmeasured. Furthermore, reliance solely on standardized tests to determine performance raises a host of problems. Most standardized tests are normed on monolingual English speakers and are inappropriate for evaluating the abilities and progress of LEP students. Evaluations of bilingual education based on a single criterion measured by standardized tests which may not be valid for the LEP population are as meaningless as evaluating the effectiveness of our monolingual system of public education simply on the basis of SAT scores. The utilization of such narrow criteria to determine effectiveness in either case misses other important and equally valid measures of success.

Attempts to determine program effectiveness based solely on one or two student-based criteria also ignore the fact that bilingual programs do not

exist in a vacuum; they face the same problems and challenges as the school district of which they are a part. All programs are shaped by the type of education offered by the local school district, and the resources which that district is able and willing to commit to address special educational needs. Many programs must struggle against educational roadblocks such as segregation, overcrowding, understaffing, and inadequate district-wide curriculum. The "regular" curriculum on which the bilingual programs are based, and the type of "mainstream" program to which bilingual program students must return, affect the effectiveness of any program. Bilingual programs, which in many instances represent only a small fiscal add-on to the per pupil expenditure, cannot be held responsible for correcting all the problems faced by students in the school district.

Given the fact that LEP students face a variety of educational problems and that Title VII was designed to accomplish broad purposes, there are a number of ways that the effect of federal bilingual programs on school districts and on limited English proficient children can be better measured. Criteria should be both student-based and institution-based and could include, but need not be limited to, the following:

1. Student-based criteria

   a. Achievement Criteria:
      - Improvement in oral English skills
      - Improvement in English comprehension
      - Improvement in English reading and writing
      - Improvement in English spelling
      - Improvement in English vocabulary acquisition
      - Improvement in other subject areas

   b. Other School-Related Criteria:
      - Changes in the student drop-out rate
      - Increased school completion rates
      - Improvement in patterns of school attendance
      - Decrease in incidence of disciplinary problems
      - Ability to stay at grade-level
      - Increased numbers of graduates attending college or vocational schools

c. Parent Involvement Criteria:
   - Participation in parent advisory committees
   - Participation in classroom activities
   - Visits to the school

2. Institution-based Criteria:

- Changes in percentage of districts implementing special programs
- Increases in numbers of trained teachers
- Increased availability of texts and teaching materials
- Increased amount of research about limited English proficient children
- Decreased number of misplacements of LEP students in special education programs
- Development of greater numbers of appropriate testing instruments
- Greater numbers of bilingual support personnel
- Greater incidence of district-wide plans to involve parents of LEP students

IV. STUDENT-BASED CRITERIA

Student-based criteria must be substantially broader than simply test-measured achievement criteria. This is due to the problems of accurately measuring student performance since most programs must rely on standardized tests normed for fluent English speaking children. It is also difficult to know with whom to compare LEP students' test scores. Comparisons with fluent English speakers are not reliable since educational problems and progress are quite different. Use of a control group of LEP students who have been denied treatment is against federal law. Other measures of school performance must also be utilized because language barriers and the previous absence of adequate programs have created a host of other problems for LEP children aside from lack of proficiency in English. Limited English proficient children have historically fallen behind in school and dropped out in much higher percentages than the fluent English speaking population. Because instruction in other subjects is often delayed while these children learn English, achievement scores in almost all areas are lower than for fluent

English speakers. Segregation and dead-end tracking based on ethnicity and/or language characteristics have been the case in many areas of our country. Routine misclassification of LEP students into special education programs solely on the basis of limited ability to understand tests in English has been all too common a practice. High rates of absenteeism, disproportionate numbers of disciplinary problems, poor attitudes toward school and lack of parental involvement have plagued this population of students. There are a variety of ways in which the undereducation of LEP students can be measured. Any program attempting to provide equitable educational opportunities to LEP students must first be able to remove the roadblocks and reverse negative educational trends.

Most bilingual programs have been designed to address a variety of these educational problems, and success or effectiveness may be operationally defined in very different ways depending on the specific goals of a program. Program evaluations must be flexible enough to reflect the variety of ways in which success can be measured. For example, an evaluation defining success only by test scores which equal those of fluent English speakers ignores the fact that most Hispanic limited English proficient children (the largest group of LEP students) have historically fallen progressively further behind with each year they continue in school until one in five Hispanic high school students from non-English backgrounds is two years or more below grade level in school. These students also drop out of school at a rate much higher than other students. For students from this educational background, programs which help them make average gains, slow the rate at which they fall behind, or simply keep them in school longer are making positive gains and are being effective. Similarly, programs which reduce high absentee rates

and disciplinary problems are also demonstrating success since they are removing educational roadblocks and helping to create an environment in which it is possible for students to learn. Outcome measures are also of great importance. A program which contributes to the number of LEP students staying at grade level, completing high school and entering some type of post-secondary program is making a positive difference for the students.

Many bilingual programs have also focused on improving rates of parent involvement, which has been positively correlated with school achievement. In the absence of bilingual personnel, parent participation has been all but impossible for limited English proficient parents. In many schools, the advent of a bilingual program brings the first school staff able to communicate with LEP parents. Prior to the presence of bilingual staff persons, attempts at communication, where they were made at all, were in a language incomprehensible to the parents. Parents were unable to communicate with the schools in emergency situations, let alone participate as classroom volunteers, join parent organizations, or help their children with homework. Bilingual programs which have been able to increase parent involvement and provide bilingual school staff to deal with limited English proficient parents have had a very important effect. Although parent involvement is an important goal of many programs, it is rarely discussed as a measure of program effectiveness. Recent and encouraging exceptions have included the Colorado and Michigan evaluations of state bilingual programs. Colorado examined both parental involvement in advisory committees and other general activities and found an improving trend over the three years in which data had been collected. Michigan compiled data on advisory committee participation and number and purpose of parent visits to the schools and

concluded that the high achievement gains of students were attributable in large part to the programs' creation of a climate of frequent family participation.

V. INSTITUTION-BASED CRITERIA

Title VII also has an important goal apart from increasing individual student achievement. That is the goal of producing changes in educational institutions and improving the capability of those institutions to design programs offering equal educational opportunities. Prior to the creation of Title VII, very few districts had special programs of any kind to address the needs of LEP children. Few teachers had training to work with LEP students and very little was known about the unique educational needs of these students. Therefore, in order to examine the success of the federal bilingual education program, changes in schools and improvements in their ability to implement programs must also be examined. One important measure of success must be the changes in the number of school districts voluntarily designing educationally appropriate programs for LEP students. Although schools have clearly had other incentives in addition to the presence of federal seed money and technical assistance, including civil rights directives from the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the Supreme Court's decision in Lau v. Nichols, Title VII has played an important part in increasing the numbers of local districts implementing special programs for limited English proficient children. The number of districts requesting assistance to design programs has increased each year and the fact that each year twice as many districts as can be funded submit proposals to the Office of Bilingual Education for Title VII funding indicates that this program is positively received by local school districts.

Since the program was designed to increase the capability of local districts to design and run bilingual programs independent of federal assistance, the numbers of districts continuing their bilingual programs in some form at State or local expense after they cease to receive Title VII funds is also an important measure of success. Although many districts do not have the resources to continue services at the same level after federal funding ends, many programs remain at some level. The real measure of difference is not a comparison made between the Title VII and post-Title VII program, but between the post-Title VII program and what was in place, if anything, before a Title VII grant. Although programs may not be as extensive as they ideally should be, there have clearly been positive changes in many cases. In some districts although there may not be sufficient funds to continue bilingual classroom aides, the bilingual teachers are retained. Additionally, the textbooks, materials and teacher in-service training received during the time of the Title VII grant remain as district assets and enable programs to be continued even if at more modest levels. Changes in district hiring patterns, resulting in the presence of more bilingual school counselors, health practitioners, psychologists and office staff are also important signs that a school district is continuing to make its programs more accessible to limited English proficient students. Any contribution which Title VII has made to reversing the historical pattern of neglect is an important measure of the program's effectiveness.

Improvements in teacher preparedness to work with limited English proficient students must also be considered as an important institutional measure of Title VII's effectiveness. The number of teacher training programs focused specifically on preparing teachers to work with limited

English proficient children has increased dramatically. Title VII, through its fellowship, training and dean's grant programs, has responded to requests from local school districts for greater numbers of qualified teachers and has been directly responsible for much of the increase in trained bilingual teachers. Inservice training to teachers already employed by school districts has also been provided via Title VII training resource centers and service centers. Although teacher eligibility requirements have not been stipulated by the federal program, many states have set criteria and offer state bilingual education credentials. Although there is clearly a long way to go before there are enough qualified teachers for all limited English proficient students, the gains to date have been substantial.

The research and information available on bilingual education and the unique educational needs of LEP students have also begun to increase, albeit at slower rate. In 1978 Congress expanded funding available for Title VII in recognition of the need for additional research and evaluation studies. The first group of funded studies is only now becoming available. Although the structure to produce needed research has been put in place, the need for indepth, longitudinal, professionally conducted research to date remains largely an unmet need. The dearth of professionally conducted program evaluations is additionally a severe problem. To be of any real use these evaluations must include all program goals and rely on more than just standardized tests as performance measures.

VI. CONCLUSION

Inappropriately narrow "test-score" definitions of program effectiveness have provided the basis for much of the current contention that there is no evidence to prove that Title VII is effective. Many of the policy statements

contained in recent initiatives to amend Title VII reflect this lack of information. Charges that federal bilingual programs are not effective run counter to the actual experience of those involved with the programs. Recent State evaluations, particularly those from Colorado, Michigan, New York and New Jersey, have had the foresight to measure effectiveness using a variety of criteria and have concluded that in their states, properly designed and administered bilingual education programs can and do make important and effective contributions to the education of limited English proficient students. If the aim of the current discussions about the effectiveness of federal bilingual education is truely to improve the educational opportunities for LEP students, then bilingual programs must be examined using broad-based student and institutional criteria which reflect the variety of ways that these programs may be changing the quality of education available to limited English proficient children.